

Three Animatics

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

by

Catherine Galbraith

Thesis Advisor

John Ludwick

**Ball State University
Muncie, Indiana**

March 2017

Expected Date of Graduation

May 2017

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Abstract

Humor is a simple but incredibly powerful part of our everyday lives. Jim Davis once said at a Ball State workshop that laughter was the meaning of life. For my honors thesis, I seek to create more laughter in the world with three short animatics. Animatics are a tool used in the animation and film industries to create a moving diagram of shots that can save both money and time. Animatics resemble short films in that they have the timing, sound, camera movements, animation, character design, backgrounds, and lighting cues all fully illustrated, but in a rougher form. Editing a film or animation in the animatic phase is cheaper because footage can be added and removed without having to actually produce it first. I used animatics as the medium to translate three of my own stories into a visual experience. The first animatic, "The Mantis who Stole Christmas," is based on a true story. In this film, praying mantises hatch out of the family Christmas tree and cause mayhem. In the second animatic, "Dating Game," a girl mistakes a matchmaking app for a game and winds up with a real date. The final animatic, "A Ghost Story," is based on my brother's paranormal experience while studying abroad. I hope that viewers enjoy these stories and that they bring them laughter!

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my parents, Ann and Mike Galbraith as well as my advisor, Mr. John Ludwick, for encouraging me to work my hardest while in school. Additionally, I would like to thank my friends and siblings for providing a source of humor and happiness in my life.

I would also like to thank Mr. Jim Davis for the inspiration for this project.

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DVD containing animatic reel

Process Analysis

As a student in Ball State's animation program, I was able to attend one of Mr. Jim Davis' comic workshops where he said something that really resonated with me. As a laid back exercise he asked everyone to draw "the meaning of life." Everyone showed their drawings of pizza, sleep, and kittens. When we finished he showed us his drawing. His sketch was of two characters, head thrown back and laughing with a big grin. Laughter. This struck me as such an incredibly noble answer. Right now especially, there is so much despair and hopelessness in our world about things that are out of our control. Sometimes what we need the most is just a good laugh. Laughter can open people's hearts to new ideas. Frida of the Guerrilla Girls, another visiting artist to Ball State, said that humor sinks a hook into your audience, making them more open to hear what else you have to say. Laughter for its own sake has also been called "the best medicine" and has been known to make people healthier. I thought this was such a wonderful policy to have, changing the world for the better by making life just a little bit lighter.

For my senior project, I tried to create laughter with three short "animatics." An animatic is a rough version of a finished animation or film. It contains illustrations, or storyboards, of what each shot will look like, complete with backgrounds, limited animation, lighting instructions, character design, timing, sound, and camera movements. A storyboarder's job is very labor intensive, but the incentive for doing it is that it heavily influences the final product. For cartoons, sometimes the storyboarders are even the ones who write the narratives. With the theme of laughter in mind, I decided to build animatics around stories from real life experiences that I found to be humorous. These three stories, one lasting one minute and two lasting thirty seconds, were assembled into a reel that I could show to a potential employer. Because I aspire to storyboard for cartoons someday, I worked hard to make these animatics a professional

quality. I learned a lot while creating these stories, and I hope I will be able to spread more laughter in the future.

Animatic 1: The Mantis who Stole Christmas

My first animatic is based on an incident that occurred last Christmas involving a praying mantis egg case that hatched in our live tree. Shortly after Christmas day, the warmth of our living room caused about two hundred of these little mantises to hatch and swarm our home.

In this animatic, the camera zooms into a forest and then cuts to reveal two praying mantises snuggling. The left mantis suddenly screeches, decapitates the other, and consumes its body. The camera cuts to follow the falling mantis head as it lands in a new family room setting. The camera cuts back to the first mantis who is now laying eggs on a pine tree branch. This scene fades and we then watch a child's hand pull a star from a box of decorations. The next shot is an action cut between a wide shot of the child's father lifting her up to reach the top of the tree and a closer shot of her putting the star on top. We then see the same tree branch where the mantis laid the eggs. Some time passes, and the baby mantises swarm out of the eggs. A baby jumps out of the tree and lands on the child as she is opening her gift. The child screams and the scene cuts to more mantises flying around. Another cut and we see a mantis knocking ornaments off of the tree. The final scene is the entire room on fire and totally destroyed as the mantises buzz around and into the camera.

I began the process of building this animatic by drawing small thumbnails in my notebook. Thumbnails are helpful because they are quick and rough, so they can be created about as fast as an individual can have ideas. I then looked over them and decided what kind of cuts and transitions I could use. For this I referenced Scott McCloud's book, *Understanding Comics*,

as well as Mr. Ludwick's class notes. Chapter three of *Understanding Comics* covers panel transitions, and because comics as a medium are so related to storyboarding, it was useful to know what kind of feelings each transition created. On the first pass, my animatic used non-sequitur transitions, however that was eventually revised. The purpose of these transitions was to tell two seemingly unrelated stories that would come together at the end. My next steps were to take these thumbnails into the program ToonBoom Storyboard Pro and time them out. It was challenging to keep the whole thing under thirty seconds. I then roughed animation and added frames to increase the story's overall clarity. The next step was to draw clean lines for all of the backgrounds, characters, and animation. The final art pass was "coloring" the lines and backgrounds. The animatic is in grayscale, but tones and lighting needed to be added for clarity and as a cue for final production were this ever to be made into a finished cartoon. Finally, I exported the video and edited the sound in Adobe Premier.

For the animatic, my initial idea was to flash back and forth between the narratives of a mantis in a pine forest and a family celebrating Christmas until it was all tied together in the end by the eggs hatching in the tree. However, this became incredibly confusing in the short span of thirty seconds of storytelling. Additionally, a friend admitted that he knew it was the "same tree" from the beginning. So as a revision, I grouped the mantis and human scenes together. I also added the scene of the decapitated mantis' head falling to the family room floor to create a question of setting. I had to remove a scene where a bulldozer was harvesting Christmas trees which caused the "protagonist" mantis to fly off. The scene then zero cut to a car driving away with a tree tethered down on top. From there, the scene with the mantises inside of the tree started. Initially the male mantis was only karate chopped by the female, but the class begged for

more exaggeration so that was changed in the end product. The final animatic was much less confusing was able to elicit some laughter from my classmates.

On the technical end of things, I learned some new skills in editing the camera movement in ToonBoom Storyboard. For the scene that zooms in to the mountainside, I needed both the camera to truck in and the drawn elements to move slightly to give the illusion of space. I now knew how to not only manipulate the camera in the program, but also how to animate objects on different layers using the program's keyframe function.

Animatic 2: A Ghost Story

Although this was the second animatic I worked on, I arranged it at the end of the reel because I believe it is a stronger piece than my third animatic. Placing it at the end will leave more of an impression on a potential employer. This story was based on my brother's stay in a supposedly haunted old dorm while studying abroad in England. He and his roommates awoke one morning to find his desk soaked in a mysterious liquid. A few nights later, the same thing happened to a different roommate's desk. People working in the building confirmed that the building has been known to be haunted, and one reported seeing the spirit using the phone booth down the hallway. My brother and his friends later uncovered an old photograph that the worker confirmed was the same man that he had seen. After that, the incidents ceased. Although the source of the water was never determined, my animatic version of the story offers a possible answer.

The animatic begins with the scene fading in and panning across a table where a boy is narrating a story to a gathered audience. His gesture action match cuts into his dorm room with his friends standing by astounded. The next cut is a desk soaked with water. Then there is

another pan showing all of the boys searching the room. Next is a tilt scene of the camera following a hand down along the wall. This cuts to a medium shot of the narrator followed by a P.O.V shot of a photograph in the corner. The scene fades into a match cut of the same photograph pinned onto a board. Then this match cuts into a mysterious figure standing by a phone booth. The next cut is a close up of this man's face which suddenly turns to face the camera. The scene then cuts back to the first setting. The next shot is an extreme close up of each of the boys sniffing the mysterious liquid. The scene then cuts back to the first setting again where one of the roommates enters from the right and says, "Dude, you still think that was a ghost?" The next shot is of this roommate approaching the desk from the front with a zipper sound effect.

The process of making this animatic was similar to the first. I began with thumbnails on paper, but this time I tried to use as many types of cutting as I could fit in. I turned the transition from the first to the second scene into a nice action cut and had multiple uses of match cuts. I was worried this animatic would take too long to tell the whole story, so I had to pick and choose the events that wound up being described. I took the scene into ToonBoom, timed it out, and roughed the animation. A challenge of this animatic was character design. I was trying to create stereotypical "frat bro" type characters, but there had to be a lot of different types of them. The ghost also had to seem a bit more detailed than the other characters. I was able to do this, but it created more work on the animation of the ghost's head turning. I then cleaned up the lines, added tones and shading, and added sound. This animatic required less sound clips, so I was able to edit it inside of ToonBoom itself.

The technical challenge of this animatic was keeping viewers interested and not confuse them with the strange narrative before they reached the end. The many different types of cutting

definitely helped to achieve this goal. On the technological side, I also needed to learn how to get objects to move in the program and keep their animation at the same time. The scene where the camera panned across the room as the boys were searching it was evidence of my experimentation with the technology. I also had to make the drawings seem a little looser because some feedback that I got on the first one was that it looked like took too long to make. I had been using Autodesk Maya to assist me with drawing backgrounds quickly, but the critique arose that my backgrounds did not have enough personality. Details like stones on the wall helped to create a less stale setting. The story may have only had one punchline, but the comedic value was a big success.

Animatic 3: Dating Game

My final animatic, the second animatic in the reel, needed to be one minute instead of thirty seconds. This one was also much more loosely based on reality, as it was based on a joke I told my roommate. My roommate Malysa was obsessed with playing Japanese anime dating games on her phone. She had about eighteen games running at once, which was quite a few dates to manage. I joked that what if she accidentally downloaded an app like e-harmony thinking that it was a dating game and a boy actually showed up at her door. In this animatic, that is exactly what happened.

The scene opens with a search bar on a screen being typed into. The next scene is a girl on a couch with a screen projected next to her downloading apps from the app store. She then starts to raise her arm and it action cuts to a medium shot of her beginning to press a button. That shot also action cuts into an insert of the screen where the button is pressed. The next shot is a screen on which an anime boy is talking. The next scene is also a tilt down a chat screen between the player and the anime boy. Then we see the girl at her computer, typing. This cuts to a P.O.V.

shot of her screen, showing strategies and walkthroughs. The next scene is the girl floating in an ethereal space, managing her different games. Then a scene of her snuggled up in her bed, still playing the games. Her swipe action cuts to a screen with apps juggling by and slowly coming to a stop. She then clicks download on a new app called matchmaker. This app then loads and pops up a new screen with names to choose from. This cuts to a shot of a new chat which leaves the girl puzzled. The next scene is her back at her computer again. Then this cuts to a medium shot of the girl and her computer screen with "no results found" visible. She begins determinably typing and it cuts to the chat screen again. This cuts to a medium close up of the girl still typing and then cuts to her P.O.V of the phone. We then cut back to the screen a little closer, and finally to a very close up button being pressed. The next scene is the girl leaning back in her chair, satisfied. Then there is a knocking on the door and we cut to the door being opened for a boy all dressed up and ready for a date. The door begins to shut quickly and we action cut to a wide shot of the girl horrified in her house. She checks her phone and we get a P.O.V shot of the matchmaker app, which now shows its real description. The next shot is a close up of her horrified expression. Then we cut to an over the shoulder shot of the girl opening the door back up for the boy. The next scene is a pan of the boy twiddling his fingers as the girl quickly gets dressed. Next is a close up of his dazzled expression when she appears in a fancy dress. The final scene is the two walking out the door holding hands.

One of the biggest challenges of this animatic was finding engaging angles for the shots of the flat phone or computer screen. I would slant the screen one way, then the other, and then a different one a little more pulled out or zoomed in. My method of creating the animatic followed the same steps as the previous two. The character animation was particularly challenging for this animatic because the character is heavy set. Because we are taught with slim nude models and

practice animation with stick figure like characters, this was a new experience entirely. I needed to make sure that I maintained a clear silhouette in her posing and make sure none of the shots made her look unflattering. My main camera transition was P.O.V cutting because of the heavy screen interaction, but I also tried to fit in action cutting where I could. On the technology side, I learned that I could edit sound clips in detail inside of ToonBoom, saving me a lot of time with volume adjustments. This animatic was more wacky than comedic, but I believe it turned out well.

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